

CHANGES IN FOOTBALL CODE INCREASE SCIENCE OF GAME



Photo by American Press Association.

HARVARD MEN PRACTICING PASSING THE BALL

By TOMMY CLARK.

ALTERATIONS in the 1912 football code are such as to change the game only in a limited sense, and from a casual investigation of the main points in which alterations have been made it would seem that these changes are for the better. Certainly they should be gratifying from a spectator's viewpoint, as there is no doubt that this year will see more of an assortment of tactics displayed in actual competition than ever before.

This has been brought about by the rule which provides for the increasing of the number of downs in which to gain ten yards from three to four. Where, in the past, a team had but three downs to try for gain, the limit was such that careful regard for safety compelled the offense to use only such plays as could be utilized without jeopardizing its opportunities to either advance out of danger or leave the ball in the opposing team's possession at the farthest possible distance from the scoring boundary. With such an alternative facing the offense, usually but one down was utilized before punting on its own end of the field or but two downs at the opposite end past the middle before either punting or placing kicking was attempted.

This year a team with the ball near its own goal line will be able to rush twice before resorting to a punt, while in the middle of the field the ball can be rushed three times. At the same time a forward pass, heretofore customary only on the second down, will probably be tried this year in the majority of cases only on the third down. As a consequence there will be fewer forward passes, fewer punts and a great deal more real football of the actual rushing kind.

Depends on Back Field.

Whether or not this actual rushing will be of the old style line bucking type, minus the element of mass play, or of the kind which is more spectacular and productive of greater advances when successful, known as end running, depends altogether on the kind of back field a team has. Certainly a team that possesses good interfering and speedy backs will not resort to the slow and wearing method of penetrating the line of defense as long as its speed and interference will succeed in circling ends. At the same time a team with a heavy back field capable of smashing a line, but slow in rounding the extremes, will play safe and do a lot of straight and cross bucking. Under these circumstances there will be many games played in which one team will play open and run wide and the other team will smash the line. In this respect it may be remarked that ordinarily a line bucking team with heavy backs will be more fitted to counteract line plunging on the part of the opposition than it will be against speed around the ends, and the team with fast, light backs will welter be-

fore line smashing sooner than it will against end running.

From what has been said it is safe to conjecture that the year will see two distinct classes of teams, one with a line smashing offense and the other with an end running offense. To defend successfully against these the defenses will have to be altered to suit the cases. The team that can combine the two offenses and has material enough to develop both lines of attack is the team to be feared, as the retention of the forward pass will weaken the line as heretofore in the matter of defense, and it will take a defense possessing steady center men, versatile tackles and sure tackling and heady ends and secondary men to adequately repel an offense that can shift from line plunging and end running at will.

The change in the rule regarding the forward pass will make little difference except inasmuch as the allowing of the pass to be legal over the goal line will keep the defense pretty nearly regular at all the points of the field, and it will be almost as easy for a team to gain under the shadows of the goal posts as anywhere else on the field. The allowing of the pass to be thrown any distance can be very nearly totally disregarded. Very few men can throw a forward pass over twenty yards with

any degree of accuracy, and when it does go much over that distance it is very unlikely that a man will be there to receive it.

There is no doubt that considerable forward passing will be done, although not as much as in past years. The play will be retained by all teams as a means of building up systems of formation and will also be utilized a great deal on the third down, but the third down will not come as often as the second down did under last year's code, and for this reason the play will lose much of its popularity.

The eliminating of the twenty yard limit has made possible also the eliminating of the field judge. This is a great benefit. It makes the number of competent officials more possible to secure and will keep out of the list one official who usually has been used as a makeshift and engaged as cheaply as possible because of the expense incurred. Now the same amount of money put into three officials as was heretofore put into four will insure as good a staff as can possibly be asked for, and because of this fewer kicks will be heard about the officiating of games. Then, too, the games will go ahead faster, as three men calling fouls will see much less than four, and a lot of delays will thus be prevented.

The throwing out of the onside kick makes the game more scientific than lucky. This is a good move. Criticism has been rife that football was getting to depend on luck more than on science. Such a state of affairs has naturally been detrimental to the game, as sport lovers in general like science. As it is, there will be plenty of the element of luck present, but a poor team cannot go in now, as heretofore, with the idea in view of taking long chances and getting away with them. This year punting will be perfected as far as possible, and with the field shortened the possession of a good punter will be a great asset, while his work will be of such a type that it will be recognized and credit given for it by the close students of games.

But while the science of punting will be favored the science of drop kicking and place kicking will receive a setback. With a touchdown and a kicked goal counting seven points it will take three field goals to get any advantage at all after the opposing team has retaliated a touchdown and its accompanying goal. Consequently fewer attempts will be made for goals from the field, and for the first time in years this science will begin to show signs of decline.

Outside of the necessity of the ten yard zones on each end of the field for forward pass purposes the compelling of these zones fills a long felt necessity. For a long time games that have been played on small fields and in baseball parks have been handicapped by the goal lines being as close as three and sometimes less yards from the spectators. The result has been that although a team has pushed the ball across the goal line at a point near the side lines it has often been hindered in carrying it behind the posts, and as a result the attainment of the extra point has been made more difficult. Injuries have also resulted from contact of the rushers with fences or the spectators, so that this zone at each end of the field will work to more advantage than one.

While the above consideration of the

changes stated practically covers every point that has been altered, the general result of these alterations has only been considered specifically in reference to the offense. The offense is the easiest department to work on this year, as it has practically every advantage in the way of attack, as it had last year, the eliminating of the onside kick being more than made up for by the allowing of four downs and the throwing out of a limit on the forward pass. Therefore, the place where the changes will be felt most is in the defense, where more situations will have to be provided for than ever before, and where also the increased attack will make it necessary to increase the efficiency of the defense if scoring is to be cut down.

Naturally more scoring is expected under the new rules than was the case last year. But whether this scoring is to be easier for the stronger or the weaker team is wherein there is controversy. This will depend wholly on whether a team is weaker defensively. If a team can develop a fair attack it should immediately turn to the defense. If a team cannot be scored on, it cannot be beaten. Therefore, wherever there are plans, the emphasis should be on the defense, and until some of the results of their efforts become known it cannot be prophesied with any degree of certainty whether the offense under the new rules can be successfully defended against. As the rules were made for the purpose of keeping the prestige with the big teams this point is what is worrying the coaches at the larger schools, and it will probably keep worrying them until the smaller games are past.

Eight Men on the Line.

It seems now that the style of defense will resolve into eight men on the line, ends playing wide, with rush line halfbacks again coming into service, the tackles and guards being made responsible for the middle of the line and the center being pulled out of place to back up. One man will probably be considered sufficient protection in the forward pass zone, and the usual one man will be back for punts, being assisted on fourth down by the fullback, who will be pulled away from his point about fifteen yards behind center.

If the rush line halfbacks can get in fast enough to make the throwing of forward passes precarious, this defense will suffice, and some phase of it will be used. It is to be doubted if more than one man will be used to back up, as some teams did last year, for the simple reason that an extra man cannot be spared for that purpose. Neither does it seem that more than one man can be spared for watching forward passes.

If so many men can be spared for the line of defense the line bucking, minus the assistance of mass play, will cause little concern to a defense of this sort and at the same time there will be plenty of men on the ends to combat end running. In such an event forward passes may be valuable, but are unlikely, for eight men across the line will make it difficult for the receiver to get down under them. From this it is plain to be seen that the attack can be counteracted, and that successfully, according to the ability of the men defending. This would put a premium on a husky defense, and a husky offense, so that the greatest result from the changes in the rules this year may be the starting of another era of heavy eleven.

Whatever turns out to be the result, one thing is certain. There will be opportunities for every kind of play, and a team that is versatile and can train a team to carry an extensive variety of formations and attacks will be a pretty valuable football center to have around. The quarterback will require more of a head (as was before), and every man playing must be able to see his share in the game. The day of the slay called "bonanza" is passed. The requirements this year are brains, alertness and as much weight as is possible, with a proportionate amount of speed.

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